



ASPIRA Policy Notes

November 1997



America Reads Challenge

Congressional studies that have found that forty percent of America's fourth graders tested below the basic level determined by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Measures must be taken in order to help students to read well, for success to be reached in school and later on in the workplace. The American Reads Challenge was first announced by President Clinton earlier this year, calling for each American to play a role, whether personally or professionally in order to help every child read well and independently by the 3rd grade.

The President's Coalition for the America Reads Challenge is composed of organizations, including the ASPIRA Association, committed to fulfilling the goals of the America Reads Challenge in order to ensure that by the end of the third grade students will meet some sort of reading standards. The America Reads Challenge Act of 1997 will provide the necessary financial support to service local reading programs for preschool aged children in both public and private schools. President Clinton has also requested the help from college presidents nation wide to allocate half of all their new work-study positions to college students who become America Reads tutors.

America Reads Challenge Legislation

- America Reads Challenge Act of 1997 passed the House with full bipartisan approval. It is still pending in the Senate.
- The \$260 million to fund America Reads has been approved by both the House and Senate but funding will not be available till FY 1999 and will depend upon the authorization of the America Reads Challenge Act or an other similar piece of legislation by April 1, 1998.
- The development of local reading programs will be designed to reach children in the greatest need of aid, such as at-risk, low income, children with disabilities or those that have limited English proficiency. The America's Reading Corps grant is at the center of this legislation which would fund 25,000 reading specialists and tutor coordinators

and 11,000 AmeriCorps members over a five-year period. By the year 2002 it is hoped that one million volunteers would be organized to assist needy students.

- Approximately \$1.5 billion will be distributed to fund classroom reading instruction and an additional \$1 billion to the Corporation for National Service that help recruit reading tutor volunteers who will assist K-3 students.
- The federal work-study programs will involve the participation of an estimated 3,300 institutions in America Reads initiatives. The President has stated that an incentive will be provided to colleges that make a commitment to the America Reads Challenge by waiving the requirements for colleges to match twenty-five percent of the funds for federal work study students who act as reading tutors.
- The House passed "The Reading Excellence Act" and which builds on the President's America Reads Challenge to provide grants to classroom teacher subgrants and tutorial assistance grants. This Act also emphasizes the dissemination of reading research, the increase in funds for Even Start and changing the America Reads Federal Work Study (FWS) program by making fifty percent of new FWS funds available through grants distributed by the Secretary of Education rather than directly to institutions of higher learning involved in America Reads. The Reading Excellence Act is still pending in the senate.

Critical Issues:

- 1) What measures will be taken to maximize program effectiveness?
- 2) What measures will be taken to provide professional development to teachers to increase their skills in teaching reading?
- 3) Will students be encouraged to read the works of authors that reflect the diversity of this country?

For Information:

1-800-USA-LEARN or TDD 1-800-437-0833
Web site: www.ed.gov/inits/americareads



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President's Initiative on Testing

Voluntary National Tests

The focus on the President's Initiative on Testing is to strengthening America's educational systems. According to a Wall Street Journal Poll, 79% of all Americans support voluntary national tests. It has been argued that higher standards, in particular, in reading and math must be addressed.

The Department of Education has offered every state and school district an opportunity to use voluntary national tests for 4th grade reading and 8th grade math, beginning in the spring of 1999. The U.S. Department of Education has enlisted the assistance of educational research firms and test publishers to develop these tests and update them every year. For the first time these tests will provide parents with their children's individual scores, that will be compared to national and international standards of excellence.

- This test will be modeled on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in 4th grade reading and the TIMSS for 8th grade mathematics. NAEP standards reflect a national opinion dealing with what specifically students and should know and what they should be able to accomplish at certain phases in their educational progress. The Department of Education has proposed that Congress authorize the bipartisan National Assessment Governing Board to set a policy for tests to be carried out by the NAEP.
- The federal government will not collect test scores. It will be up to state and local school districts to decide how to properly use this data. These test scores should help measure standards of excellence which can be useful for parents to hold schools accountable for their children's educational performance, assist teachers in developing appropriate lesson plans according to the educational levels of their students and help students measure their own individual educational progress.

- Negotiations are currently underway to dealing with the possibility of implementing a pilot-testing program.
- Sample test will be distributed in 1998.
- Qualified and licensed organizations will score, and report on their evaluations. They will also be reimbursed for the costs to carry out such a test.
- Results will be released to the public annually.

Critical Issues:

- 1) Can one test (alone) accurately measure what a student knows and is able to do?
- 2) Will psychometricians with expertise in the education of English as a 2nd language students be involved in the test development?
- 3) Will special considerations be made such as extra time for ESL students, as with other students with special needs?
- 4) How can the misuse of test scores be minimized?
- 5) How can ethnic and cultural differences be taken into consideration in the design of the test?

Update:

On November 13, 1997 President Clinton signed into law P.L. 105-78, the Labor-HHS Education appropriations bill for FY 1998. This bill provides full funding for the development of the first year voluntary tests in 4th grade reading and 8th grade math. Pilot testing will begin in Fall 1998.

For more information:

U.S. Department of Education 1-800-USA-LEARN
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
(202) 219-1385
<http://www.ed.gov/nationaltests/1997>



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National Dropout Prevention Act

According to the Census Bureau (July 1997) Hispanic student dropout rates rose from 9.2% in 1994 to 11.6% in 1995, the highest level this decade. Measures must be taken to address and effectively deal with this issue. Since 1989 the prevention of student dropouts has been a bipartisan national education goal. The National Dropout Prevention Act, S-1295 introduced by Senator Bingaman will establish a program solely dedicated to lowering student dropout rates. This legislation is organized in the following sections:

Title I: A Coordinated National Strategy

A national priority to lower the dropout rates would be established. A new dropout "Czar" position will be created in the Department of Education to develop a plan enabling states and local school systems to better access federal funds and a develop five-year funding strategy for federal programs that focus on dropout prevention efforts. A new center will also be created to gather and distribute dropout prevention information and data regarding race, ethnicity and gender.

Title II: A National Dropout Prevention Initiative

Schools characterized with the highest dropout rates in each state will be restructured. Funds will be provided in order to increase academic challenges and provide learning and career preparation programs.

Title III: Dropout Prevention in the Vocational Education Act of 1965

This effort would stress the importance of lowering dropout rates as a performance indicator used to measure the success of federally funded vocational education efforts.

Title IV: Dropout Prevention in TRIO and other programs

Already existing programs such as the TRIO programs designed to encourage at-risk youths to pursue a college education and Upward Bound's dropout prevention strategies will be enhanced. A special priority will be given to communities who in the past have received less attention and support in effectively serving more at risk students.

Title V: State Responsibilities

In order for states to receive funding for elementary and secondary education, they must: 1) adopt within one year strategies to collect and report on dropout statistics, 2) adopt within two years procedures that encourage schools to retain as many students as possible, and 3) establish within three years alternative measures to deal with long term suspended or expelled students.

Title VI: Funding and Authorization

A total of \$100 million will be authorized for Fiscal Year 1999 for initiatives and programs outlined in Title I and II, and an additional \$100 million for Title IV programs. Federal funds will be awarded to public middle and high schools with dropout rates that are in the highest third in the state. Funds could be used for professional development, purchase of curriculum materials and planning, and research. The size of grants will be determined by the size of the school, and other data, such as poverty rates.

Critical Issues:

- 1) Will there be sufficient funding to address this issue and provide viable solutions?
- 2) What roles will community based organizations play in this important effort?
- 3) What incentives should corporate America provide to support this effort?
- 4) Will funds intended to promote participation in postsecondary education under TRIO be intruded upon?

For Further Information contact:

National Dropout Prevention Center, Wanda Bailey at
1-800-443-6392

Committee on Senate Labor and Human Resources,
Kimberly Barnes O'Connor at (202) 224-5375
Office of Congressman Bingaman, Alex Russo at
(202) 224-5521



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Welfare to Work Legislation

The Department of Labor's implementation of Welfare to Work (WtW) grants program as authorized by the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 is key to the national strategy to establish a new system that promotes work and responsibility.

The primary goals of this new grant program are:

- 1) to break the cycle of dependency by promoting responsibility and work, and
- 2) to move the most difficult to employ welfare recipients into unsubsidized jobs in order to achieve self-sufficiency.

This grant program gives the opportunity for employers to take advantage of this workforce development system and to utilize the client support resources as outlined by the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Job placement is available to the client and follow-up support services and training are also available. Private Industry Councils, community based organizations and local elected officials must organize and operate WtW programs that take advantage of TANF resources in order to maximize the common goal of placement into subsidized jobs.

Guidelines include the following:

- **Funding:** grants total \$3 billion (\$1.5 billion to be awarded in fiscal year 1998 and \$1.5 billion in 1999). Grant categories include: formula grants to states and competitive grants to local communities.
- **Targeting of Eligible Participants:** WtW legislation targets service programs that deal with "hard-to-serve" TANF recipients who face barriers which make it difficult for them to move into unsubsidized jobs providing long-term employment opportunities. 1) Seventy percent of grant funds must be spent on individuals who are long term welfare recipients (with 30 months or more), or face termination of TANF assistance, and who lack at least two of the following: GED, poor reading or math skills, require substance abuse treatment for employment, have poor work history, or are a non-custodial parent of minors whose custodial parent meets the criteria mentioned above. 2) Thirty percent of grant funds may be spent on individuals who are recent recipients of TANF assistance, or non-custodial parents, who reflect a relationship with long term welfare dependence.

- **Use of funds:** Funds may be used to help move eligible individuals into long term-unsubsidized jobs. Contracts or vouchers for job placement services supported by these funds, require at least half of the payment is allocated after an eligible individual is placed into the workforce and has sustained a job for six months.
- **Program Outcomes:** States must qualify for programs, by at a minimum demonstrating their success in serving eligible individuals by: 1) placements in unsubsidized jobs, 2) duration of such placement, and 3) relative increase in income earnings. States may also qualify for a performance bonus in FY 2000.

ASPIRA has been working with the Department of Labor to provide input to the legislative language for the WtW grants program.

Critical Issues:

- 1) Will this legislation insure that those most needy will not fall further into the poverty gap and end up homeless?
- 2) What measures will be taken to provide program participants with the skills necessary to enter the competitive work force?
- 3) How will this initiative be evaluated?
- 4) Will there be long term follow-up on participants to determine the long-term impact of the program?

Update:

The first round of WtW competitive grants program applications are due by March 10, 1998. These grants will assist states and local communities to provide the transitional employment assistance needed to move hard-to-employ recipients of TAF into unsubsidized jobs.

For More Information contact: U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration at (202) 219-6050 or <http://wtw.doleta.gov/>



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President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities

The President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities is a small federal agency devoted to support the communication, coordination, and promotion of public and private organizations with the goal to increase the employment of people with disabilities which also include individuals from culturally diverse backgrounds. This committee provides the necessary technical assistance on this issue to organizations, families and individuals with disabilities.

Current 1997 Initiatives:

- Operate the President's Committee's Job Accommodation Network (JAN), a toll-free information and referral service of employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The mission of JAN is to assist in the hiring, retraining, retention or advancement of persons with disabilities by providing accommodation information.
- Cooperate with the U.S. Department of Education and various organizations that serve people from culturally diverse backgrounds, in the training of disability leaders on cultural diverse issues.
- Expand the Business Leadership Network (BLN), a national employer-led program that collaborates with various state Governors' Committees to promote leadership and participation of companies throughout the U.S. in order to hire qualified individuals with disabilities. BLN also provides disability employment information to employers and the opportunity to provide training and employment experience for job seekers with disabilities.
- President's Committee Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP) identifies qualified students with disabilities throughout the U.S. and with the help from the President's Committee and U.S. Department of Defense, the Workforce Recruitment Program strives to provide summer employment opportunities in the federal government. Other efforts are currently under way to also include the private sector. The WRP database that lists the qualifications of students is now accessible to both public and private sector employers.
- Expand the High School/High Tech Program, he current national demonstration project sites that encourages students at the secondary level and below to take the necessary academic preparation and skill training in order to pursue careers in

engineering, science and high technology fields. This program provides paid internships and mentoring for high school students with disabilities.

The ASPIRA Association, Inc. National Office has collaborated with the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities to address the alarming high unemployment rate facing Hispanics and other minority groups with disabilities. Moreover, ASPIRA is committed to implementing strategies and pursue community solutions that address this problem, with the guidance and support from the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities.

Critical Issues:

- 1) Is this committee adequately funded to meet the long-term needs of this vulnerable population?
- 2) How will these initiatives be evaluated?
- 3) How will interagency coordination take place?
- 4) How will information on these initiatives be disseminated to the target population?

For further Information contact:

President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities

Mr. Claude Grant

Phone: (202) 376-6200 Fax: (202) 376-6219

Web page: <http://www.pcepd.gov>.

JAN at 1-800-526-7234 contact Dale Brown

BLN contact Carol Dunlap edunlap@pcepd.gov

High School/High Tech Program, contact Dick Sheppard at rsheppar@pcepd.gov

The American with Disabilities Act (ADA):

Is a federal civil rights law that prohibits the exclusion of people with disabilities from everyday activities. Technical assistance is available involving ADA Standards for Accessible Design and other ADA requirements in applying for businesses, non-profit service agencies and state and local government programs.

For more information contact:

ADA information at 1-800-ADA-WORK

Computer Bulletin Board 1-800-342-5526

Internet Access at <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada>